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**History, Prophecy, and the Stars: The Christian Astrology of Pierre d'Ailly, 1350-1420. Laura Ackerman Smoller**

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Review

Reviewed Work(s): History, Prophecy, and the Stars: The Christian Astrology of Pierre d'Ailly, 1350-1420 by Laura Ackerman Smoller

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cation for Galileo's use of mathematics in physical science, and this is the main reason that these theories have recently come under scrutiny. Steven J. Livesey has contributed more to this field perhaps than any other scholar, with a series of studies and editions mostly of fourteenth-century Oxford theologians, including William of Ockham, John of Reading, and most recently Robert Graystones. In the present book Livesey presents a critical edition, with introduction and facing-page English translation, of four questions on subalternation by the fifteenth-century Dominican friar Antonius de Carlensis of Naples, two from his *Questions on the Sentences* and two from his *Questions on the Posterior Analytics*.

While I have not read it against the manuscripts, I have found a few places where the edition might be emended, especially in the questions on the *Posterior Analytics*, which are edited from the single known manuscript. In several passages, for instance, Livesey prints *arismetica* (= *arithmetica*) instead of emending it to *armonica* (= *harmonica*), which the argument requires (pp. 44, 47; cf. p. 51); and in another he prints *methaphysicus* (= *metaphysicus*) instead of emending to *mathematicus* (p. 41). Other misreadings, misprints, or needed emendations I noticed in the Latin (excluding obvious variants in spelling) were *convenientier* instead of *convenienter*; *subalternare* instead of *subalternari* (both on p. 44); *sine* instead of *siue* (p. 45); *plus* instead of *prius* (p. 47); and *abstrologia* instead of *astrologia* (p. 52).

In general the translation is both accurate and readable, a balance difficult to attain with such technical and jargon-ridden texts. Only in a few passages does the sense of the Latin seem less than clear in the English. By providing a facing-page translation, Livesey has offered his understanding of the text while at the same time allowing us to come to our own conclusions.

Livesey has done a superb job in identifying the many sources and quotations used by Antonius (some of which are available only in manuscript), thereby locating him in relation to Hervé Natalis, Paul of Venice, Aegidius Romanus, Thomas Aquinas, and other scholastic writers on subalternation. Further, in the introduction Livesey briefly sketches Antonius's treatment of subalternation (which was not especially novel) and compares it to that of another fifteenth-century Dominican, Dominicus of Flanders.

For Livesey, the significance of these questions lies more in their eclecticism than in any specific opinions or novel doctrines about subalternation that they might contain. But I think it also lies in their being part of the transmission

(or mistransmission) and elaboration of medieval—and especially Thomistic—notions about subalternation, the mathematical sciences, and theology as a science, which would culminate in the modified Thomism of sixteenth-century Dominicans and of Jesuit teachers at the Collegio Romano. If these ideas about subalternation were not the direct inspiration for Galileo's mature scientific method (as William A. Wallace would have them be), then at least they form the common tradition of Galileo's Dominican and Jesuit opponents. With this edition of these questions by Antonius de Carlensis, we are one step closer to understanding that tradition.

W. R. LAIRD

**Laura Ackerman Smoller.** *History, Prophecy, and the Stars: The Christian Astrology of Pierre d'Ailly, 1350–1420*. xii + 233 pp., illus., tables, apps., bibl., index. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994. \$35, £26.50.

In this admirable monograph, on the astrological and apocalyptic writings of the famous cardinal and scholar Pierre d'Ailly, Laura Smoller begins by drawing our attention to his subsequent influence on Christopher Columbus. It seems almost poetic justice that the continent to which modern astrology owes most for its survival should have been discovered by a man who voyaged in the astrological belief—inspired by a 1483 printing of d'Ailly's works—that the end of time was at hand. But the intellectual world in which Columbus lived was not the old world in which his sources were conceived. Smoller is careful to avoid the all-too-common mistake of treating medieval and Renaissance astrology as an entirely seamless web, and she provides a careful account of the complex interrelations of late medieval astrology, Christian thinking, and the rational study of the world in general. This introductory material—balanced and well chosen though it may be—is of secondary importance. What makes her book so valuable is that it allows us to see into the mind of an individual, one immured in a set of beliefs for which most of us can have no real sympathy. She shows how astrology appealed to him as offering a rational means of interpreting history and prophecy, and how it brought such ambitions into jeopardy by dragging with it the twin problems of free will and divine omnipotence.

Astral influence on the world was typically seen as an aspect of God's plan for the world's unfolding history. Academic astrology was not primarily a magical art—*pace* many a modern



Frontispiece from Pierre d'Ailly's *Concordantia astronomie cum theologia* (Augsburg, 1490) showing an astrologer and a theologian in harmonious discussion (reprinted in Smoller, *History, Prophecy, and the Stars*).

writer—but a way of understanding the pattern of human history at a personal and social level. In the first case there were the personal horoscopes, medical practices, and so forth that concerned the human individual, but it was on the grander scale that d'Ailly invoked astrology's assistance. God acted on the world through secondary causes and associated legitimate authority, he thought, with certain signs. Brushing over the logical connection somewhat, he argued that the proper authority over the Church was a body of wise Christian men, namely, the General Council. Theologians remember him chiefly for his conciliar theory and tend to view with unease his defense of astrology as a form of natural theology underpinning it. D'Ailly's concern for the Great Schism in the Church (1378–1414), however, was both a cause and an effect of his astrological awareness. Smoller amply justifies the thesis that the division in the Church led him to take seriously the imminence of the apocalypse and that he eventually turned to astrology to suppress his fears, becoming convinced in the course of doing so that a Church council could heal the rift.

Most of d'Ailly's writings were the product of

the last ten years of his life (1410–1420), but he was no novice then. Starting from a cautious Thomistic stance, he grew increasingly enthusiastic, and by the time the Council of Constance was convened (1414) the science—and in particular the theory of great conjunctions—had led him to conclude that the End was *not* nigh. Smoller traces his changes of heart, and the influences of writers who helped to bring them about, with meticulous care. On the way she raises numerous important questions. Why, for instance, were there not more examples of astrologico-historical writing in the fifteenth century, in view of the fact that it could unite the passing troubles of the Church with the grand history of human salvation? What were the differences between God's time and astrological time conceived to be? How best should one relate biblical utterances to astrological ones? Smoller offers partial answers to these and many comparable questions. She writes with economy—the main text of her book is under 130 pages, although its rich annotation is more than half as long—and with good sense. Her book is sufficiently general for it to be read as an introduction to medieval astrology, but it is narrowly focused where it matters. For the reader in a hurry, the penultimate chapter, "Astrology and the Postponement of the End," is essential reading, and a model of how to cross medieval intellectual frontiers with impunity.

J. D. NORTH

**Pierre Brind'Amour.** *Nostradamus astrophile: Les astres et l'astrologie dans la vie et l'oeuvre de Nostradamus*. 561 pp., illus., tables, apps., bibl., index. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press; Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1993. Can \$48.

More than four hundred years after his death, Nostradamus continues to fascinate. His life and writings have inspired an unending stream of books and articles and even a recent feature film. But much of this activity produces only imaginative fiction or groundless speculation. Pierre Brind'Amour's scholarly and engrossing book returns Nostradamus to his historical context, documenting the "Nostradamus phenomenon" that made him for the last twenty years of his life a European celebrity and best-selling author, beset by plagiarists and literary pirates. Brind'Amour cannot avoid entirely the "naive but inevitable question": Was Nostradamus a prophet or a charlatan? The author modestly concludes, without attributing to his subject the power of clairvoyance, that one cannot deny his